

Sabbath School Lesson #1 – How to Read the Psalms – 30 Dec 2023-5 January 2024

Christ revealed in Psalms: “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:44-45). We do well to note that the Psalms are the words of Christ. “David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His Word was in my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:1-2). Indeed, in the whole Bible we have the Spirit of Christ, in the prophets, testifying (1 Peter 1:10-11), although often, as in so many of the Psalms, the writers often described their own personal experiences. Thus, in Inspiration we have the mystery of the Incarnation. Christ in the flesh, as Man, has all the experiences of mankind, so that no one can have suffered anything or passed through any sort of trial that Christ has not endured; nay, more, that Christ does not at that very moment share. When we read the Bible, but especially the Psalms, with this in mind, we find in them unsearchable riches of comfort.

Sunday: The Psalms in Ancient Israel’s Worship – Praise was used in ancient Israel’s worship, and praise is prominent in Psalms. In that context, what is the strongest argument against all opposition to the truth of God? It is Praise. This appears plainly from the eighth psalm. We quote two verses: “O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.” From the mouths of babes and sucklings comes a power that is sufficient to stop the mouths of the enemies of the Lord. But little children cannot argue and discuss; if they attempted, their reasoning is feeble, and the effect is painful, because it is unnatural for them, and out of place. What does naturally come from the mouths of children? – praise, and joy. This is seemly and is the power that can stop the mouths of enemies. This is not merely our conclusion. We have the words of the Lord for it. When the children cried in the temple, as Jesus entered it after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and said, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” and the priests were displeased, Jesus said to them, “Have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou has perfected praise?” (Matthew 21:16). Thus we have Christ Himself as authority for the statement that the “power” mentioned in the eighth psalm is praise. It is difficult to frame an argument to which a shrewd man cannot make some plausible reply, a reply at least plausible enough to cover his retreat. But who can frame an argument against praise? There is nothing to reply to. Even the enemy’s anger against the truth and the one who holds it, must, to some extent be appeased, because “a soft answer turneth away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1). Then let us use the argument of praise more and more. Let us learn how to use it to the exclusion of everything else. “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High” (Psalm 92:1). “Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely” (Psalm 147:1). “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders” (Psalm 107:31-32). And who many praise the Lord? One sentence is enough to answer the question that is asked; it is this: “Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 150:6).

Monday: Meet the Psalmists – Whilst we acknowledge that the Psalms were written by several prophets besides David, let us dwell on what the Lesson writer says: “The Holy Spirit inspired the psalmists and used their talents in service to God and to their community of faith.” Why is this very important? So that when we receive the psalms, as those who did receive the words of Paul, we “received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). If we receive the psalms as the word of God, then we know that the Word of God is infallible. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The statement that Scripture proceed wholly from the Spirit of God, which is also the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9), is

frequently stated in the Bible. Let us read few of these in connection with the psalms. “Now these be the last words of David. David, the son of Jesse, said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:1-2). David spoke the word, but it was the Word of God. Again, 1 Peter 1:10-11: “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you; searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” Who was it that testified? It was not the prophets themselves, but the Spirit of Christ that was in the prophets. The prophets did not understand the full import of the things that the Spirit testified through them but had to study their own writings. Notice the following Scriptures, the distinction made between the psalmist who was used and the source whence the revelation came: “Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus” (Acts 1:16). “Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?” (Acts 4:24-25). The psalms are the word of God, and as the word of God, it is infallible as God. “As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried; He is a buckler to all those who trust in Him” (Psalm 18:30). “The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6). “For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

Tuesday: A Song for Every Season – What song in psalms could you sing in a season of reproach by your professed brethren because you will not be move from the truth; hedged in round about by reproach, what could you do? I could only exclaim with the “sweet Singer of Israel,” “Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel. Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me” (Psalm 69:6-9).

Wednesday: Inspired Prayers – Read Romans 8:26, 27. What do these texts teach us about prayer? It is not only in prayer the Spirit helps us, but also by the Spirit we are adopted into the family of God as sons (see Romans 8) and made joint heirs with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit establishes the bond of relationship. It is the “Spirit of adoption,” the Spirit proceeding from the Father as the representative of the Son, that proves that we are accepted as brethren of Jesus Christ. Those who are led by the Spirit must be even as Christ was in the world and are therefore assured of an equal share in the inheritance with Christ. For “the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”

Thursday: The World of the Psalms – What helped the psalmist to say, “I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8)? It was the Bible. In the days of King David, the Bible was a scanty book; yet he loved it well and found daily wonders in it. Genesis, with its sublime narration of how God made the world, with its glimpses of patriarchal piety, and dark disclosures of gigantic sins; Exodus, with its glorious marching through that great wilderness, it's thrilling memories of Jehovah's outstretched arm, and the volume of the written law; Leviticus, through whose flickering vistas David's eye discerned the shadows of better things to come; Numbers, with its natural history of the heart of man; Deuteronomy, with its vindication of the ways of God; Joshua and Judges, with their chapters of Providence, stirring incidents, and peaceful episodes; the memoir of Job, so fraught with spiritual experience; and the domestic annals of Ruth, which told to her grandson such a tale of divine foreknowledge, and love, and care, all converging on himself, or rather on David's Son and David's Lord; these were David's Bible, and he desired it beyond all his riches. But you have a Bible – Bible with psalms and prophets in it – a Bible with gospels and epistles. How do you love that book? How often have you clasped it to your bosom as the love of your counsel? How often have you dwelt on its promises, until they evolved a sweetness which made you marvel? How many times have you praised the Lord for the clearness of its light, the sanctity of its truth, and the sureness of its immortality?